

A Lonely Heart

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Summary: Its a story about Usagi and Mamoru and the trials they must go through before they can finally be together

1. Usagi

A Lonely Heart

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Chapter One-- Usagi

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The light shone through the thin lace curtains of her bedroom window, reminding her it was morning.* It was a dreamâ€œif only it were reality. I really have to stop having dreams like that. It only makes my real life seem more depressing.* With a sigh, she stood up and walked to the bathroom to shower. The bright yellow of the bathroom tiles and only seemed brighter due to the small window to her right. Walking to the sink, she stared at her reflection sadly.* Why me? Why can't I have friends, and lead a normal life?* Her normally bright blue eyes seemed duller than normal, her shiny silver blonde hair limp. Grabbing a fistful of the ankle length strands, she glared at it. This was one of the reasons she was ostracized at school, that and her clumsiness. * Why can't I be more graceful? Why am I even asking that question? I can't be something I'm not, I guess, and what I am doesn't seem to be all that fantastic. *

Sighing resignedly, she stepped into the shower, wishing the hot water pounding on her skin could rid her of the hurt she would have to go through once more this day. After stepping out of the shower she washed her face quickly, hastily putting on blush and lip-gloss. Once she had her school uniform in order, she walked across the plush blue-gray carpeting, passing her cherry oak dresser and looked once

again into the mirror, checking her odangos.* Perfectâ€œ|the only one in school with this long hair and the only one with odangos...might as well remain original.* With a cynical laugh, she walked swiftly to the door of her bedroom, glancing down the hallway, stood in the doorway and took a deep breath. * Show time. *

She walked quickly down the hallway, over the wooden floors, which felt cold against her stockinginged feet. Approaching the stairs she pasted a false smile on her face, pinched her cheeks and ran down the stairs lightly grasping the wood banister. The instant her feet touched the ground floor, she launched herself into the sunny kitchen. The single window above the sink was open and the transparent white silk curtains rustled in the breeze. She entered the kitchen at a run and saw her mother, father, and brother all sitting at the table eating peacefully. Her father had a newspaper in front of his face and was sipping contentedly from a mug full of coffee. Her mother was trying to get her younger brother, Shingo, to eat some decent food. She looked up with a smile at her only daughter, and gave her a glass of orange juice.

"Is all your homework done, Usagi?" She asked as she handed her son a bright red apple, fresh from the orchard down the road.

"Yes, Mama! I have it here." Usagi replied, pointing to her schoolbag. She watched amused as her brother finally gave in and ate the apple.

Shingo munched on his apple, his face mutinous and looked at Usagi. She looked tired this morning, he thought. Must have been up studying all hours again. Who would have thought that HIS sister would have brains? He continued to munch, contemplating his sister.

Usagi never noticed her brother looking in her direction as she drank her glass of orange juice quickly. Gathering her book bag from the floor where she placed it when she had sat down at the table, Usagi stood up, kissed her mother and father goodbye and took off for school, moving quickly and happily out the door. * If only they knew the act I go through every morning, making my parents think I am so happy and content with the way my life is going. It would be unfair to tell them my problems, they work SO hard! * Usagi was concentrating hard on her thoughts, and was walking slowly towards school.

It never occurred to her to look up as she turned the corner toward school, her right arm lightly brushing the cold cement of the building to her side. She was oblivious to all the happily chatting students heading toward the same cold, institutional building she had been subjected to for the last 3 years. The students looked so happy. All of the students were in groups, and the individual students were heading towards the group that they belonged to. The smiles on their faces and the animated way they moved their hands as they spoke to each other proved they were comfortable showing their emotions to each other, and had made a connection with they person they spoke with.* I only wish that I had someone I could really talk to. Naru is busy with many other things, and can't be stuck dealing with a leech like me. I look like I'm only hanging around to get some attention from ANYONE. It's too bad that's actually what I am doing.* Taking a deep breath, Usagi walked confidently through the thick iron-wrought gates that seemed to close ominously behind her.

Usagi walked down the hallways that were full of laughter from the many students that inhabited the relatively small school. She caught sight of Naru and waved a greeting. Naru smiled and walked up to Usagi, looking very happy.

"Guess what, Usagi? You will never guess!!" Naru cried excitedly, "Umino asked me to meet his family tonight at a dinner they are having with a couple of other people that they know! Isn't that great??!" Naru practically squealed with excitement.

"Naru, did you forget? Tonight we were going to see the new movie!" Usagi cried with dismay, her plans for the evening were dismissed like they were never planned. Her eyes clouded with tears she refused to shed, knowing in her heart that Umino was far more important in Naru's life than she was.

"Oh, Usagi! I'm so sorry! It completely slipped my mind when Umino asked. Will you forgive me just this once? We can go tomorrow, ok?" Naru's green eyes shone with an emerald glow from the mist of tears in her eyes. "I really want to go to this party! I need to meet his family, and gain their acceptance of me. I can prove that I will make a good wife to Umino!" she continued fervently.

Usagi took a deep breath to calm her. "It will be alright Naru, honest. But I can't meet with you tomorrow night because my family and I are really busy. I'm sorry! You go and have a good time with Umino. I will forgive you, of course. How could I not? You are my best friend. Always remember that." Usagi stated calmly before saying goodbye and headed to her homeroom, sighing sadly.

Usagi entered the homeroom and discovered that nothing had changed since the day before. Still ignored by her fellow students. Most looked up expectantly when the door was opened, expecting Ms. Haruna, and upon seeing only her in the doorway, steadying her emotions, they turned back to their own conversations. Being used to getting the cold shoulder due to her high academic scores and unique hair color, she headed toward her desk. Usagi waded through the different groups standing around, or sitting in their desks, talking enthusiastically to each other on her way to her normal desk. Her desk was in the center of the classroom, its scratched wood surface, with many messages left on the desk after all its years of use. One message was a remnant of the class that she was in. "Usagi is a freak". Written in bold black letters on her desk.

She tried not to be affected by the harsh words, as she had to look at them day after day, refusing to tell Ms. Haruna about her problems with her fellow students.* It's something that I need to just ignore. The more emotion I show, the meaner they will be to me, I've learned that already.* She unloaded her school bag, extracting all the documents needed for class. All the papers had neat handwriting and were all done carefully. The more important documents, like her term paper were on the very top. She decided to waste some time by reading over the page again as she waited for Ms. Haruna to enter the classroom.

She didn't have long to wait for Ms. Haruna to enter the room. Her teacher walked into the room, commanding attention with her appearance. Long auburn wavy hair ended at the small of her back, lying softly against her soft gray wool blazer. Her white blouse under the blazer had small pink and purple flowers at the collar, and

the gray skirt reached her knees. Straight, white teeth showed when she flashed a smile at the classroom, waiting patiently for everyone to return to their seats.

Once everyone was seated, Usagi kept her gaze averted from everyone in class, not wishing to see their looks of disdain because she was prepared to hand in her term paper several days early. Ms. Haruna began her lecture for the day, writing several notes on the chalkboard. As she spoke, Usagi leaned her chin on her hand and listened attentively, occasionally hearing people whisper around her, and wondered what they were talking about.* It's so lonely sometimesâ€| why doesn't anyone wish to speak to me? I just sit here in class and take notes, and try not to cryâ€|* With a quiet sigh, she began to pay attention in class, the morning passing quickly.

Lunch break was announced with a discreet bell, and Ms. Haruna excused her students. Usagi took this moment to talk to her and hand in her paper early.

"Haruna-sensei, I have finished my term paper, and would like to hand it in early, if its not an inconvenience." Usagi stated softly, her husky voice sounding almost breathless.

"Oh! Usagi-chan, you are finished already? Well, I'd be more than happy to take it off your hands. Hereâ€| let me find my folder." She said as she searched through her somewhat cluttered desk to find a blue folder with the words TERM PAPERS written in black marker with her own bold script. "Thank you Usagi-chan! Maybe your example will prompt other students to hand theirs in early as well. Makes it easier to grade, only getting a few at a time!" She laughed, and it sounded musical to Usagi, who herself hadn't laughed in what seemed likeâ€| forever.

Usagi smiled and bowed before leaving to try to eat some food for lunch before classes began once again. She headed immediately toward the usual secluded spot that she liked to sit at. It was a under a large tree, that had to have been on the school grounds since it had been built. The grass seemed greener there, its lushness a perfect spot for her to sit and read her English translations. She never looked up once to admire the clear azure sky, or looked around to see the blooming flowers. However, once a shadow passes in front of her, she looked up with a sigh, expecting it to be one of her classmates going out of their way to ridicule her.

She was unprepared for what she did see. Looking up at her would be perpetrator, she saw a pair of eyes surrounded by long full lashes, and the eyes were so perfectly blue it almost hurt to look at them. As she continued her appraisal, she saw hair a raven black, and he flashed a smile at her.

"Uhâ€| hi. My name is Chiba Mamoru, and I noticed that you were sitting out here and was curious as to what you are reading."

Her eyes widened in surpriseâ€|* Is this a cruel joke?! What is going on here? Iâ€| I don't understand. Why is he talking to me? Who is making him do this??*

"Hi! I'm Tsukino Usagi. I'm just reading the assigned chapters for History. I'm surprised anyone saw me out here! Usually no one comes

over here." She smiled sweetly, her soft rose lips parting in a sincere smile.

"Oh! I'm sorry! Did I disturb you? I'll leave." Mamoru said in a rush, blushing a little, and already turning to leave.

"No! Wait! That's not what I meant. I just meant that people just don't come over here. I'd enjoy some company. Please have a seat." She swept her arm out pointing to the general area.

Mamoru looked around for someplace to sit, uncertain of how close or far away he should sit. He finally decided on a tree stump not six feet away from her. As he leaned in he smelled a light scent of roses that seemed to surround her. * Who is this girl, and why is she sitting alone out here?*

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2. Mamoru

A Lonely Heart

Disclaimer: I do not own Sailor Moon(although I wish I did) and I am not Naoko, so please don't sue this poor college student! Just enjoy the fic! ^_^

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A Lonely Heart

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Chapter Two: Mamoru

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"Mamoru-kun!! Mamoru-kun! Wake up! Your flight is leaving!!" Motoki screamed in Mamoru's ear, attempting to wake him from his deep sleep. Mamoru was sitting in an airport chair at the John F Kennedy airport, and had fallen asleep waiting for his flight, which had been delayed for over 3 hours.

"Uhâ€|I'm awakeâ€|I'm awake! You can STOP shaking me now Motoki!!" Mamoru sat up groggily from the chair that he had been sleeping in for the past hour. He groaned as he worked out the stiffness in his neck. He blinked several times, the sun shining through the windows causing him to squint before he slipped on his dark sunglasses.

"My flight is boarding now? Damn, it's about time! I've been waiting here forever." Mamoru said, annoyed that he had waited so long. He looked at his watch and was surprised to see how late it was.

As Motoki escorted him towards the gate where a line was waiting, full of disgruntled flyers snapping at the flight attendant, who was attempting to take it politely. "So, why do you want to go to Japan so bad, anyway?" He asked, curious.

"Well, to be honest, I have no idea! Ever since my parents died, I have been restless here in the United States. I hate to leave my native soil, but I need to get away, and for some reason I feel like I need to go to Japan. (Sigh) Thankfully, some of my father's

relatives live there, and they were more than happy to have me come over. I get to practically start my life over." Mamoru sighed again, still somewhat confused why he wanted to go to Japan. He rubbed a hand through his thick black hair and took off his sunglasses, as he was getting closer to the front of the line.

Once Mamoru reached the front of the line he and Motoki said their goodbyes. "As soon as I get to Japan, I'll call you Motoki! Ok?" Mamoru promised.

"Yeah, sure! We have to keep in touch, you know? What are best friends for, right?" Motoki said, smiling sadly as he watched his best friend walk down the hallway and out of his life. He knew that it would be a long time before he saw Mamoru's piercingly blue eyes, or his boyish grin.* I'm gonna miss the guy.* Motoki sighed as he left the airport, looking up and seeing the large airplane shooting off into the sky, leaving behind a trail of exhaust.

The warm sunlight heated the side of Mamoru's face as he stared out the window of the airplane with eyes blind to the scenery. The plane flew high over the ocean and through the clear blue skies. Mamoru wasn't thinking of the beauty of the ocean or the brightness of the sun as it hit him across the eyes, instead he was thinking of something that happened over 1 year ago

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It was nearly 8pm when the Chiba's finished eating their dinner at Nora. As they stepped out of the doors of the crowded restaurant, they were surprised to see it had been sleetting for a bit while they were in the restaurant. "Serves us right for not sitting next to a window, right honey?" Mr. Chiba said with a small laugh. Mrs. Chiba, on the other hand, was not amused. Her lips were pursed tightly and her face was white. She gripped her purse tightly and looked around apprehensively. Her hand shook as she ran it though her hair nervously, and her voice had a slight quiver as she spoke. "We have to get home and off the roads before this gets any worse! It could be very dangerous making some of the turns. I don't want to get into an accident!" Mrs. Chiba's voice rose as she spoke, and her words ended in a high squeak.

"Mom, relax! It's only a little sleetâ€¦ what could happen? We have driven through sleet hundreds of times. I'm sure it will be alright." Mamoru said soothingly, trying to calm his mother.

As Mamoru attempted to calm his mother's fears, his father stepped off the sidewalk and onto the parking lot area to walk towards their car. His wingtips weren't much defense against the slippery ground, and he had only taken about five steps before he slipped and fell on his butt. He stood up and looked back to see his wife and son leaning against each other as their mirth caused their bodies to shake helplessly. Mr. Chiba shook his head sadly and continued walking towards his car, mumbling under his breath. He slipped several more times on his journey to the car, but never falling down again. A few minutes later, the Chiba's black Mercedes pulled to a halt in front of Mrs. Chiba and Mamoru, its wipers moving rhythmically across the smooth glass of the windshield. They pulled from the parking lot and continued their short journey to the countryside, where their house was. The streets were quiet due to the bad weather, and Mrs. Chiba continued to look out the window anxiously.

"Mom! Relax, please! We will get home all right. There is no one on the roads right now, and I'm certain that Dad is being very careful about it." "Oh, Mamoru. I know he is being careful, but until we get home, I won't be able to relax."

"Hon, if you want to relax, I'll tell you a joke! Ok, there was this one plane that was starting to crash to the ground, and one lady stood up and said, ' I have always wanted to be treated like a real woman! Will someone here treat me like a woman? I don't want to die until I feel like a woman.' Suddenly a tall handsome man stood up from the front row and began to walk towards her. As he got closer, he began to unbutton his shirt. The rest of the passengers were silent as he got close to her. He was standing before her and he took off his shirt, leaned close to her and said 'Iron this.'"

Mamoru cracked up and kept laughing as his mother glared at his father. "HONESTLY! Where do you come up with those?" she exclaimed.

Mr. Chiba and Mamoru laughed, and eventually their laughter filled the inside of the car, and relaxed everyone inside the car. They were so relaxed that they didn't see the dog dart out onto the road at first. The bright headlights of the luxury car flashed across the body of the small dog, and Mr. Chiba forcefully turned the steering wheel to avoid impact with the animal. Mrs. Chiba screamed as the car turned over and began to cruise headfirst into a large brick building. Mamoru's side of the car was scraping along the cement as the car began what seemed a long collision course with the old mom and pop grocery store. Mamoru was jerked forward as the car impacted with the brick building, crashing through the wall and smashing the windshield glass; the car's wipers still attempting to keep the glass clear of the sleet. The glass rained across the faces of Mr. and Mrs. Chiba, causing more yells and screams of pain from the front seat. Mamoru's own window shattered and one piece of glass lodged in his upper arm wrenching a scream from his throat. The last thing he remembered before he blacked out was his parents' screams of pain.

Mamoru cracked his eyes open to the sight of flashing red lights and lots of voices. He struggled to sit up, wondering where his parents were, but a pair of arms appeared out of nowhere to hold him down. As he resisted the bonds, he felt pain pierce his upper arm and gasped in pain. Mamoru looked down at the source of his pain to see fresh blood trickle down his arm. He looked around desperately, looking for his parents, only to see two stretchers with body bags.

"NOOOOO!!" He screamed in anguish and blacked out.

Mamoru jerked forward in his seat, covered in a sweat. Those damn memoriesâ€|always coming back at inopportune times. I wish I could just forgetâ€|

"Are you ok, sir?" A soft voice asked to his left.

Mamoru turned to answer and found himself staring into a pair of violet eyes framed with long dark eyelashes. Her face was pale with cheeks slightly flushed. She smiled slightly with concern, her pale lips curling slightly at the corners. As she was waiting for an answer, she lightly tossed her long, dark hair over her shoulder.

Mamoru smiled in return, "I'm fineâ€| just a bad dream, I guess. No need to worry."

"Well, I was concerned as you began to thrash about in your seat, but then you suddenly stopped. I wasn't sure if you were going to wake up. You have been napping since you got on the flight!" She said with a small laugh.

"Yeahâ€|" Mamoru began with a small laugh, rubbing the back of his neck with his hand.

"Oh! Excuse meâ€| where are my manners? I'm Hino Rei, future priestess of the Shinto Shrine! I just love to travel and learn about many different religions, and I'm going back to Japan to be with my grandfather. I just came back from Washington D.C. What about you? What are you going to be doing in Japan?"

"I'm going to be staying with some relatives for awhile and going to school there. I decided that I didn't want to stay in the United States right now, and decided to take a break from it all. My father's relatives are very nice and I'm anxious to see them againâ€| its been years." He said a bit sadly.* The only reason I'm going to Japan is because my parents are dead. Was there NOTHING I could have done about the crash? Maybe if we hadn't gone out to dinnerâ€| Maybeâ€| oh why am I focusing on 'maybe'? It won't change anything nowâ€| *

"Are you alright?" Rei asked, concerned. She laid the back of her hand against Mamoru's forehead. "Hmmâ€| no fever. Is there something wrong? Anything that I can do?"

"There is nothing anyone can do right now, but thanks for trying to help." Mamoru smiled weakly and went back to staring out the window for the remainder of the flight, his thoughts once more returning to the past.

Two hours later, the plane landed safely at the Tokyo Airport and Mamoru exited, smiling once again at Rei as he walked off the plane in search of his new parents. She gave a small wave and smiled in return. * I'm never going to see him again, am I?* Rei sighed sadly and went to find her grandfather.

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Mamoru was surprised to see his uncle, aunt, and cousin waiting for him in the airport lobby. His little cousin was holding a sign that said, 'WELCOME TO JAPAN MAMORU!!' in her childish handwriting. As soon as she noticed him, she quickly ran over to him and hugged him around the waist, still holding onto the sign.

"Did you like the sign? I did it with only my favorite crayons!! See? Welcome is in red, To is in Blue, Japan is green, and Mamoru is in Orange!! Do you like all the hearts on it too?!" She asked excitedly, her voice rising with excitement. Her dark brown eyes bright with her youth and as she smiled she showed her missing front tooth. She absently brushed a loose strand of hair off her eyes.

"Megumi! Calm yourself! Mamoru just got in!" chided Arina Chiba. Arina smiled gently and gave Mamoru a little hug as she welcomed him.

Her head barely reached his chin as she hugged him and as she pulled back, she looked into his eyes, seeing the sadness and hurt.

"Mamoru! It's so good to see you again! You have grown so big!" Hikaru Chiba said with his booming voice and gave Mamoru a whack on his back in welcome. His wide smile hid his concern for his nephew, who appeared to have lost a lot of weight since the pictures were taken of him from the previous Christmas. His dark eyes filled with concern for the health of his nephew. He quickly shook off the sadness, intent that his nephew would enjoy himself while he was staying with the family.

"Come now, its time to see the house. We have your room all set up. Arina, can you and Megumi take Mamoru to the car and I'll get his luggage?"

She nodded her ascent and Megumi grabbed Mamoru's hand, chattering about all the good manga she had been reading lately. Megumi talked to Mamoru the entire way to their car, which was parked just outside the doors.

"Mamoru, where will you be going to school? I don't believe that you told us which school you selected. I certainly hope that it is near our home, so you don't have very far to walk." Arina commented as she opened her passenger side door and sat down. She turned around in her seat to be certain that Megumi also buckled up and smiled at Mamoru in question.

"I believe I will be attending Azabu High School. It seems like a prestigious school, and I hope to continue my education there. It's only a mile from your house! Don't worry, I can make it there just fine."

"Ah! There he is! My, your luggage must have been some of the last off the plane!"

Hikaru quickly loaded the luggage into the trunk and they drove from the airport towards the Chiba home in central Japan. Their small sedan was able to move around some of the slower moving trucks and they reached their home in less than 20 minutes.

"Its good to be home! C'mon Mamoru, I want to show you what your room looks like!" Megumi grabbed Mamoru's hand and dragged him into the house. She quickly pulled off her shoes and put her slippers on. Megumi straightened her pale yellow dress as she waited impatiently for Mamoru to put his slippers on. She grabbed his hand once again when he had finished and brought him to his room. Quickly opening the door, she ushered him into the spacious room. "What do you think??" She asked anxiously.

Mamoru looked around the room, his eyes wandering over the white walls, and shining oak floors. He quickly panned past the futon, covered with a dark blue comforter and his eyes centered on a family photo taken at Christmas, only months before the crash. He blinked away fresh tears and continued his assessment of his new room. There was a large desk in the far corner of the room and also quite a few empty shelves. On the other side of the room there was a closet and attached to the closet handles were several Mylar balloons all welcoming him to his new home.

"I think it's wonderful! Thank you Megumi. Did you make this picture?" He asked, walking over to his bed to find a crayon drawing of a family of four. Above every person was a name: Mommy, Daddy, me and my new brother Mamoru.

"Yes I did!! Do you like it?" she asked excitedly.

"I will treasure it forever, Megumi. Thank you!"

Hikaru entered the room to bring the luggage in and Megumi left so that Mamoru could unpack. "I'll come get you when dinner is ready, Mamoru!!" Megumi called, as she was lead from the room by her father.

The evening passed quickly for Mamoru in his new home. The laughter at the table brought back old memories. * I refuse to think of the past! I must move on to the future. Mother and father wouldn't have liked for me to be sad. I will no longer think of the past. The past is overâ€; they are dead! NOTHING CAN CHANGE THAT! * Mamoru laughed at something Megumi said, but left the table early, pleading fatigue.

Once he got to his room, he lay down on his bed and tried to sleep. Tomorrow is a new day, a new school, and lots of new people to meet. Everything will be fineâ€!

Morning came too soon, and Hikaru dropped him off for school. "Only for the first day!" He called out as he drove away from the school. Mamoru sighed, tightened his hold on his schoolbag and entered the school, heading directly for the office. The school was still fairly empty and his shoes echoed on the hallway floors. He entered the office and was greeted by a nice secretary with friendly eyes and thick glasses. After filling out the forms he was directed to his first class. He entered the classroom with some trepidation and was surprised that so many students were already in the classroom. The teacher had already seated him when a blonde girl walked into the room. Her hair was up in a different hairstyleâ€; different than any he had ever seen. Her eyes were lowered, and she quickly made her way through the other students and sat at her desk, only three seats away from his own desk. She quickly bent over her homework instead of talking to the other students, as all the other people in the classroom were.* I wonder why everyone is ignoring her? She is really beautiful and seems pretty niceâ€!* As class went on, he paid attention to the teacher but his eyes kept drifting to the mysterious blonde girl. * I wonder why everyone treats her like she is a curse? I guess I'll just have to find out for myself. * Once he decided what he was going to do, he became determined to find out why she was treated so differently. The classes passed quickly and it wasn't long until it was time for lunch. Many students went off to a popular picnic area on the school grounds, but he was more interested in following the girl so that he would get a chance to meet her.

He looked around the area and glimpsed her as she went around the corner of the building. * I wonder where she is going toâ€; I hope she isn't going home! I want to get to know who this person is.* Mamoru quickly followed her and found that she had sat down on a tree stump not far from the building. He straightened his clothes, cleared his throat and cautiously walked over to where she was sitting. She quickly looked up from the book she was reading as his shadow passed

over her, her pale blue eyes wary.

"Uhâ€| hi. My name is Chiba Mamoru, and I noticed that you were sitting out here and was curious as to what you are reading."

Her eyes widened and he got a better look into the depths of her ocean blue eyes. * I wonder why she is so surprised. *

"Hi! I'm Tsukino Usagi. I'm just reading the assigned chapters for History. I'm surprised anyone saw me out here! Usually no one comes over here." She said with a smile, her full lips parting into one of the most beautiful smiles he had ever had the luck to see. * Wowâ€| *

* Oh godâ€|have I interrupted something? What if she becomes really angry with me? I just wanted to get to know herâ€|I better go! How embarrassing, intruding on someone else when they wanted privacyâ€|*His face flushed a little as he attempted to get out of her hair, "Oh! I'm sorry! Did I disturb you? I'll leave." He turned around quickly, practically tripping over his feet as he rushed to get away.

"No! Wait! That's not what I meant. I just meant that people just don't come over here. I'd enjoy some company. Please have a seat." Usagi said in a rush, her arm gracefully swept around the glen in which they were sitting as he turned around again.

He looked around the area uncertainly. * Where should I sit? Not too closeâ€|not too far awayâ€|*He quickly sat on a tree stump not too far from where she was sitting. Mamoru placed his elbows on his knees and leaned forward before asking, "So why are you sitting out here all alone? I noticed you in class, and you didn't say much and I hoped to get a chance to say hello to you during lunch, but you were very hard to find."

"Oh, I sit out here a lot, it's a very relaxing place to be at and it gives me time to get away from the other students."

Mamoru gave a little laugh, "You are avoiding my question. I asked you why you are out here; you gave a very general response. There must be a more precise reason than that."

"You are very curious aren't you? Well, to be honestâ€|I'm not very well liked around here, ok? Is that a good enough reason? They treat me like I'm some sort ofâ€|of FREAK! I just don't want to be around them unless I have to. I get really sick of being treated like something that I'm not." Usagi said in a rush, her voice angry, and her words harsh.

"Well, there is one thing that I will promise you now, and I will mean it forever."

"And what promise is that?" Usagi asked, her head lowered to hide her tears.

Mamoru stood up and walked up to where she was sitting. He knelt down in front of her and tilted her chin up with his right hand and with his left hand he wiped away the tears that were slowly flowing down her cheeks.* How could I do this to her? I just wanted to get to know her. I am such a jerk! * He looked deep into her eyes, his own eyes

intense as he made his pledge.

"I promise to always be there when you need me, Tsukino Usagi."
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3. Budding Friendship

A Lonely Heart

A Lonely Heart

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Chapter 3: Budding Friendship
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Usagi's feet gently touched the ground as she propelled herself higher in the air, swinging slowly back and forth on a swing at the playground just off the school grounds. Her gaze was focused on Mizuno Ami. Ami practically glowed with happiness. Her blue hair blew lightly in the wind as she walked along the sidewalk with her friends.

Usagi was close enough to hear parts of their conversation. One of Ami's friends moved in a little closer and gave her a smirk as she commented, "Ami! I have noticed your eye on the new guy at school!"

Ami blushed as she replied, "Have I been THAT obvious? Do you think that he noticed? I just hope he isn't dating Usagi. They seem to be so close!"

"There is no way that Usagi can be dating him! He's so cool! Usagi is only a brain and he could do better than thatâ€|by being with you! Hmm ...I've got it! The reason that Mamoru spends so much time with Usagi is because she is helping him with his homework." Another of Ami's friends proposed.

"Sara! That is so mean of you! Usagi seems really nice; she's just â€|quiet! I'm sure that Mamoru wouldn't spend time with anyone he didn't think was worthy of his time. And rememberâ€|they HAVE been spending a lot of time together. The only way to find out is to ask Usagi."

* Sheâ€|she defended meâ€| * Usagi smiled slightly as she slid off the swing. She stood up and began to walk towards home when two warm hands covered her eyes. Warm breath blew on her ear lightly as a voice teasingly asked, "Guess who?"

"Hmmâ€|I don't know! A strange old man, perhaps?" Usagi replied with a smile, her eyes still covered.

"Guess again! Think tall, dark and handsome!"

"Now I definitely don't have any idea!"

The hands were removed quickly and Usagi turned around to see Mamoru clutching his chest and leaning against a tall tree. Sunlight

filtered through the branches and glinted off Mamoru's dark hair.
"Ouch! That hurts, Usagi!"

She laughed in response, her mirth causing her shoulders to shake.
"Iâ€|Iâ€|knew. Knew it wasâ€|youâ€|" She struggled to say between her laughter.

While Usagi controlled her laughter, Mamoru straightened up against the tree and looked around for where he had placed his book bag when he had decided to sneak up on Usagi.

"Calm now, Usagi?"

"Yes, thank you." She replied cheekily.

"I'm sorry to make you wait. Some members of the student council held me up. Then, the soccer team asked me to try out."

"Are you going to?"

"Yeah, I used to play when I was in the States."

"Wellâ€|I guess I'll forgive you! Plus, I found out a secret about you!" Usagi said teasingly as she walked away.

"What did you hear?"

"Nothing!"

Mamoru hurried to catch up with her, curious. "Come on! Tell me."

Usagi sighed, "Oh fine! Someone has a crush on you! But, she can't make a move because she thinks that we are dating or something. I think that you should get to know her and ask her out. I hear she is pretty nice."

"Who is it? Waitâ€|she thinks that we are dating? No way!"

"It's Mizuno Ami, and yeah, I guess so. She says that since we spend a lot of time together, we are dating! Silly, huh?

"Yeah, I wonder why she would think that. Hmmâ€|wait a second! Did you just tell me you expect me to date her?"

"Yes, Mamoru! You need to get to know more people besides me. I know you are going to be in sports now, but you really need to do stuff with other people. I know I'm not the only one that thinks you are a great guy! Get out and make more friends."

Mamoru sighed, "Usagi, I LIKE doing stuff with youâ€|"

Usagi held up her hand, effectively stopping Mamoru from continuing. "Mamoru! You know that isn't what I mean. You can't do EVERYTHING with me. I didn't say that I wanted to end our friendship; I just want you to get to know more people. If you spend too much time with me, you will never get to know ANYONE! I want you to be happy and around more people. You can't hide behind your parent's death any longer. You need to get out and do more things with your life. You said yourself that your parents wouldn't be happy if you moped around

all your life. Yes, you may get hurt if you do things with other people, but where is the fun? Promise me, Mamoru. Promise me you will go out and meet new people." * You deserve better, Mamoruâ€|better than what I can give you. Far better. *

"Ok, ok!" Mamoru said with a laugh, holding his hands up in defeat, "You win! I'll talk to Ami tomorrow, ok? My, you are a great persuader."

"Yes, I know!" Usagi replied breezily.

"Hey, I gotta head home. I promised Megumi I would help her with her homework. I'll talk to you later, ok?"

"Ok! Don't forget your promise!" Usagi called after him.

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Usagi tightened her hold on her schoolbag and began to walk towards her home. She was halfway home when she decided to take a small detour. * I need to let him go. He can't hang on to me forever. I doubt I will ever see him again, but last week was greatâ€| * A tear left a trail as it slowly made its way down her cheek. * I know I can let him go. * Usagi straightened her shoulders, and continued down the sidewalk. * I am going to let him go. * She continued down the sidewalk, her gait purposeful. A loud squawk was heard above her and Usagi looked up to see two crows flying overhead.

"Phoebos! Demos! Come down here!" A feminine voice called out.

Usagi's curiosity was piqued and she walked forward until she saw the entrance to a shrine, "Hikawa Shrine" she read off a small piece of wood near the entrance. She walked up several stairs to see a girl kneeling by two crows, her long black hair pooling behind her. Her attention was focused on the crows, one of which turned in Usagi's direction and squawked. The girl's head whipped up and her intense gaze was focused on Usagi.

Her step faltered and she began to walk away, feeling that she was entering an area where she was prohibited.

"No! Wait!" The girl called out. "I'm sorry! I was just surprised to see someone standing there. I'm Hino Rei and I work at this shrine. You're welcome to enter. Is there anything I can help you with?" While she was talking, she moved closer to Usagi.

Usagi looked into Rei's eyes, and relaxed, seeing her violet eyes were kind and contained no cruelty. "I'm sorry, too! I heard you call out to your crows and was curious. I'm Tsukino Usagi."

"Oh! Well, free to come in, you look like you need someone to talk to." Rei spoke softly as she led Usagi into her home; the doors already open in welcome. She led Usagi to a small table, its cherry wood surface polished and reflecting the glints of the sunlight.

Usagi sat down at the table as Rei left to go get some tea. She stared down at her reflection in the table, and its distorted features stared back at her. * This is meâ€| * A lone tear trickled down her cheek at the thought and she angrily brushed it away. At

that moment Rei returned with the tea.

"So, what is bothering you?" Rei asked calmly as she poured her and Usagi's tea. As soon as she sat down, Usagi began to tell her about what had been bothering her recently. The finished the pot of tea, and it was over an hour later when Usagi finished speaking.

"Wellâ€|" Rei began only to be interrupted by Usagi.

"Before you say anything, I want to thank you for listening to me and would like to invite you to dinner at my house! My mother is a fabulous cook, and she should be expecting me home at any time, soâ€|â€|if it's not too much trouble, please come over!"

Rei looked slightly shocked by the invite, and only nodded her head to let Usagi know she wanted to come over. Usagi jumped up from her seat and grabbed Rei by the arm. "Ok! Let's go then! I'm sure that my mom is waiting for me!" Usagi said excitedly.

"Whoa!!! Let me at least change my clothes, ok!?" Rei asked with a laugh. Usagi reluctantly let go of her arm and as Rei walked away to change, she went outside to sit in the sun. She sat down near a tree and idly tore a piece of grass from the ground and spun it around in her fingers, she then let go of the piece of grass and watched it blow away with the wind. Rei stepped out of the door and walked to where Usagi was, her hair was left flowing and it rested against her red shirt and flowered skirt, her feet were covered by a pair of sandals and she gracefully walked over to Usagi and helped her to stand up.

As Usagi led Rei to her house, the 15-minute walk went by quickly as Rei told amusing stories about all her trips to different countries. Usagi walked ahead of Rei to the entrance of her house. As soon as she entered, she called out to her mother, "I'm home! And I brought a guest over for dinner. Her name is Hino Rei!!"

Her mother walked out from the kitchen, absently wiping her hands off on a towel. "Another guest? How many people do you expect me to feed?" She asked with a smile.

"What? Another guest? Mom what are you talking about?" Usagi asked, confused.

"Me. That's the other guest. Did you forget you invited me over to dinner, then to study?" Mamoru's deep voice came from behind her, near the entrance to the living room.

"Oh my gosh!" Rei's voice was hushed, "I never thought I would ever see you again." She said, staring at Mamoru in surprise.

Mamoru's back straightened with the tension he was feeling. *Oh godâ€|please don't remember what I was like on the planeâ€| * He looked at Rei warily as if she were a hunter and he was her prey. "Yes, it is nice to see you againâ€|was it Rei?"

"Yes. It's Reiâ€|Hino Rei. I don't think that you ever introduced yourself, though. What is your name?" she asked with her calmest voice, her hand outstretched in an attempt to get a handshake.

Mamoru smiled tentatively at her and shook her hand, some tension leaving his shoulders. Usagi looked back and forth between them, thoroughly confused. She raised her right hand a bit in a bid to get some attention turned her way. "Uhâ€|hello? What is going on here?? Can someone tell me what is going on!?"

"I happen to be Chiba Mamoru and this happens to be a slightly annoyed Usagi!" Mamoru said with a small laugh.

"Mamoru and I met on the plane. He was napping and hit me in his sleep! That is one passenger that I don't want to be next to ever again. After I got off the plane, I thought to myself that I would never see him again, but here he is! What a fabulous surprise." Rei explained to Usagi.

Usagi smiled to cover the slight regret she felt at reuniting them. * Oh what have I done? Will I lose them both? Wellâ€|I guess it's a chance that I am willing to take. *

"Dinner is ready!" Usagi's mom called out to them, and there was a mad dash to the dinner table. That was one race that Usagi was more than happy to win.

During dinner, the heavens opened and a downpour began with an occasional flash of lightening. Usagi looked at Rei after they finished off the last piece of cherry pie and shrugged. "Rei, since my father isn't here, there isn't a car hereâ€|" she began only to be cut off by Mamoru.

"Usagi! Did you forget the car my uncle loaned me? I can drive her back home and then come back to study for the test tomorrow. Does that work out?"

"Sure! I can go with and show you where it is, then I can formally say goodbye to Rei." Usagi replied enthusiastically.

"Sorry to disappoint, Usagi, but my car is a two-seater. They need the sedan for when they all go out and do stuff, so I get to borrow the Miata."

Usagi's shoulders drooped in disappointment. Rei piped up and agreed to take the ride to her home. Usagi led Rei and Mamoru to the door reluctantly, her eyes believing that they made a cute couple, and "knowing" that if Mamoru began to date someone, she would become just some rung he stepped on as he rose to the top of the ladder. She waved them off and slowly closed the door. Once it was shut, she leaned against it, her eyes clouding with tears.

She picked up her schoolbag and walked to her room to begin her homework, certain she wouldn't see Mamoru again that night.

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4. Just This Once...

A Lonely Heart

A Lonely Heart

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Chapter 4: Just This Once

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Usagi sighed and sipped her coffee, already immersed in her studies when a light knock was heard on her door. She looked up distractedly to see the door being pushed open by someone she hadn't been expecting—Mamoru. Usagi sat up hurriedly and stared at him in surprise. "Wha—?" She left the question unsaid.

"Usa—what kind of person do you think I am? That I wouldn't come back? I was hoping that you might have more trust in me, but I understand you have been through a lot. Please remember the promise I gave you and try to believe that it's true, and that I truly am your friend, as is Rei from what I can tell."

The words he said to her went through her head, "I promise to always be there when you need me, Tsukino Usagi.", and she sighed. "Mamoru, I'm so sorry! It's just automatic to assume the worst, and I hope that you will forgive me!" She looked at him pleadingly, her blue eyes gazing into his own.

"Well—I'll forgive you if you can get some chocolate chip cookies from your mother!"

Usagi laughed in relief and picked up her books so they could go to the kitchen and study with the aid of chocolate chip cookies and milk.

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Two days later, Usagi saw Ami coming her way and decided to make a rash decision. She walked up to Ami, "Ami, can I please have a moment of your time?" She asked politely and was surprised when Ami agreed readily to speak to her.

"What did you want, Usagi?" Ami asked curiously.

Usagi looked around them, only seeing several lockers and no other students. She didn't want to be interrupted before she finally told Ami why she was talking to her. "Ami, I have something to ask you! Are you interested in Mamoru?"

Ami turned a light tint of red and looked down once, then trained her blue eyes on Usagi before answering, "Yes, I am interested in Mamoru. Is that going to be a big problem? I don't want you to be upset with me, but I didn't know if you guys were dating or if you were just friends—"

"Wait!! I'm not mad or anything! I'm actually quite glad that you answered yes to my question. Mamoru and I are just really good friends, and I heard through the grapevine that you might be interested, and I thought that I should butt in. I think that you and Mamoru should date. He, however is a little shy, and I think needs some encouragement."

"So—" Ami pondered this incredible news for a moment before replying, "you think that I should ask him out? Is that what you are telling me?"

"Yes!! That is exactly what I am telling you! You should just go up to him and ask him out. I just know that he will say yes, and I also believe that you two will make a fantastic couple!" Usagi said enthusiastically. Inside, she was crying, * Oh Mamoru, the one thing that I really want for you to be is happyâ€|please be happy with Ami. *

After discussing when and how Ami should ask Mamoru out, the two separated, and Usagi wondered if she would ever talk to Ami again.

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The next day during class, Usagi absentmindedly doodled on her notebook before Ms. Haruna entered and called the class to attention. Her thoughts were interrupted when a soft, feminine voice was heard to her right.

"Thank you, Usagi! He said yes, and we are going out this weekend! I'm so excited!" Ami chattered to Usagi, not noticing how the class had gone incredibly quiet as she spoke.

Usagi, never missing when she was being stared at, ducked her head before mumbling a "You're welcome." She continued to listen to Ami talk about her plans about what she and Mamoru were going to do on their date, and soon forgot that they were the center of attention in the classroom, moved a few feet closer. "How dare you say something like that to Usagi! That was incredibly horrible of you. You don't have to worry about us coming near you again. We don't need your money. We don't need to have you around so our status around here rises because you are some sort of "superstar"! Lose the ego, or never expect to have people want to be near you. I'm surprised that you have any fans at all, you egotistical little brat."

Minako stared at Mamoru in shock, her own conscience slapping her for the horrible things she said. * Good move, Mina! You just ruined a great chance! She was trying to be nice to you. * But then her own insecurities crashed in, causing her to forget her conscience and to instead act like she was in the right. * I know that she was just using me! She probably thinks that because she lives here that she should "help" the new girl to fit inâ€|become her friend so she can use her for all she can. Well, I'm NOT going to be treated like trash ever again. No. Never. Not ever again will that happen to me. Too many people leave me because of my career. My father left me, thank God that my mother still hangs around me, but that may only be due to the fact that she is my managerâ€| NO! I won't think thatâ€| she loves me. I know she does. I have to believe that she does. If I believe that, then I know that someone out there, who knows me, loves me. Can't I believe that? Can't Iâ€| * Minako then straightened her shoulders, raised her chin and walked swiftly back to class, ignoring all the other students that were already heading back into the school.

Usagi turned to Mamoru, her troubled eyes gazing into his own determined ones. "I know you want to Usagi, but you can't! Give her time, maybe then she will realize that she should treat you better than that."

She sighed and nodded, acknowledging that he was right. Her own thoughts were blaming her for Minako's sudden outburst. * You can't

seem to do anything right, can you? You always mess up! Get it straight girl, she put up the warning signs when she introduced herself to class, why try to help her? You only will cause yourself more hurt in the future. Best to not get involved. Butâ€|you want more friends, don't you? You need to fight for them, and your own respect! If you don't respect yourself, then who CAN you respect? You know yourself, and its time you respected yourself and were treated the way you should be treated. Ohâ€|who am I fooling? I will just wait out this storm and see what happensâ€|* Usagi finally broke from her thoughts, gathered up her leftover lunch and followed Mamoru back into school.

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Usagi walked quietly alongside Mamoru on their way to her house to study after school. Mamoru looked at Usagi out of the corner of his eye, hating to see her look so defeated. It was only several moments later when they both heard an odd noise coming from behind a tree and went to investigate. Usagi pushed aside some of the brush next to the tree only to find Minako leaning against the tree, sobbing quietly. Should I even bother? Will she turn me aside again? * Usagi pondered, biting her lip in indecision before realizing that there was no chance she was going to leave Minako the way she was. "Minako?" Usagi queried quietly, not wishing to scare her.

Minako started and turned towards Usagi, trying to wipe her face free of tears before meeting Usagi's eyes. Her face puffy and red from crying, with her eyes still misty with unshed tears; she reluctantly turned to the girl who once again offered her friendship. "Yes, Usagi?"

"Are you ok? Is there anything I can do?" She asked with a smile. Minako gazed into Usagi's blue eyes and then looked at Mamoru, seeing him still angry at him, and flinching at what she saw in his eyes, she turned her eyes downcast and stared at her hands. She waited several more seconds before replying. "Iâ€|I don't knâ€|know why I said those horribleâ€|things! I feel s-s-so bad now. I wish that I could take them back. Please forgive me. I will n-never say so many bad things to you again. Never!!"

Usagi looked up at Mamoru, and he turned away from the look in her eyes. The haunted look in her eyes was enough to tear out his heart. * She shouldn't have to put up with this! She should be happyâ€|not like this. * He could hear Usagi reassuring Minako that it was all right. * Can I turn around and say, 'It'll never be all right? You can't say things like that to Usagi and expect them to be all right! I know that I'll never forgive you.' GOD! Usagi deserves better than this. * He finally turned around, his hands no longer fisted to see Usagi hugging Minako.

"Listen, Usagi, I never meant what I said before. I really never did. Most people don't talk to me, or try to help me out like you did. Most people do like to use me for social status because of who I am. Please, can we just be friends? I need a friend here since I'm certain that I really upset the entire classroom with my entrance. It's just thatâ€|being mean and snotty always seems to be easier to deal with than being used. " Minako explained as she separated herself from Usagi.

"Minaâ€|can I call you Mina?" After receiving her nod, she continued, "Mina, I would love to be your friend. Not many people here like to

be my friend either, so I guess that it all works out, right?"

"What? But I thought that you and heâ€|and he is so popularâ€|?"

Laughing lightly, Usagi replied, "Oh, we aren't dating, he's only a friend. Just because he is pretty popular doesn't mean that I have to be. I will understand if you don't want to be friends with me. I'm certain that if people get to know you better, that you will find many friends here." She stood up and glanced at Mamoru before starting to head home.

"Wait! That's not what I meant. I just assumed that since you hung out with him, that you were popular as well. That doesn't mean that I don't want to be your friend, in fact, it makes it easier to be your friend! I'd rather not be very popular, myself."

"Really?" A small spark of hope lit up Usagi's blue eyes.

"Yes, really! With so many people to have to impress, it's easier to only have several close friends. I've also learned that it is the quality, not the quantity of friends you keep close to your heart. You don't appear to be the kind of person who will bad about me as soon as my back is turned."

Mamoru and Usagi simultaneously rolled their eyes when Minako spoke of impressing people. "Well, do you want to study with us for tomorrow? We are heading to my house now." Usagi invited and smiled happily when Minako agreed.

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Everyone began talking the next day when Tsukino Usagi, also known as "the Freak", entered Azubu High School along with Aino Minako, now dubbed as "the Prima Donna". The gossipers still couldn't understand the reason that the Freak fascinated Mamoru so much. They had assumed that his distraction would have faded by now and that he would realize that she wasn't that important, but he persisted to spend the majority of his time with her, much to their frustration. Knowing that she obviously could not be as interesting as they are, they went on their merry way, certain Mamoru would soon come to his senses.

Besides Mamoru's preoccupation with this freak, one of the most popular girls, Ami, was beginning to speak to her more often. What was this odd fixation that they seemed to feel towards her? It obviously wasn't for better grades (although it remains to be said about this Minako girl) for Usagi, Mamoru and Ami are the school's three top students, in that order. Could it be her money? No. Ami's mother was a doctor and thus rich; Mamoru was only staying in Japan for an undetermined length of time. Why is it? They needed to find out soon.

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"So Mamoru, how did the date go?" Usagi asked as she jogged to catch up with him before their study date at the library.

Mamoru turned around and began to walk backwards as he answered her question, his schoolbag slung carelessly over his left shoulder. "It went just fine." He replied with a grin. His deep blue eyes sparkled

with merriment as he waited for her to ask more questions.

"Oh come ON!" Usagi exclaimed with a laugh. "You know that I'm dying to know what happened." She said as she tugged on his gray polo shirt.

Laughing, Mamoru led Usagi to a wrought iron bench that was in the shade of a willow tree. "Fine, here is exactly what happened!"

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Mamoru rubbed his damp hands nervously on his black dress pants and loosened his gray tie before beginning the long stroll up the walkway leading to the blue-gray house, its white door a beacon. As he cleared his throat, he rang the doorbell and heard the chimes ringing softly throughout the house. It wasn't long before Ami opened the door wearing a yellow flowered dress, her hair flowing freely and a large smile on her face as she ushered Mamoru into the entryway. The crystal chandelier cast odd shadows within the narrow entryway, reflecting off the marble floor. Ami shyly looked at Mamoru before talking, her voice cracking with her nervousness. "Mamoru, my parents aren't here tonight, so you don't have to worry about meeting them. So, where are we off to?"

"Well, I made reservations downtown at the best place I could think of! It's called, Kalisto. I have heard good things, have you?" Mamoru asked nervously, fidgeting as he stood in the entryway, looking everywhere but at Ami.

"Uh...yep. Yes, yes I have, and I can't wait to go. Just let me get my coat, 'k?" Ami walked over to a heavy oak door and opened it to pull out her coat. The soft brown leather coat hung to her knees and she turned to Mamoru and smiled, slipping on her blue and gray gloves, "Let's go".

Mamoru led Ami to his car, its red surface shining with the light from the moon, and he opened her door for her before entering the car himself. He smiled nervously at her as he pulled away from the curb. "So, uh, Amiâ€|how is school?" Mamoru finally stuttered out.

As Ami fidgeted with her hands, she stared at her hands as she replied, "Just fine, thank you."

Complete silence filled the car, and an intense tension began to be felt between the two occupants. Both stared straight out the windshield, the glass occasionally receiving a small glare from the streetlights and oncoming cars. Mamoru cleared his throat several minutes later, causing Ami to jump. "Umâ€|so what kind of movies do you like?" He asked.

Ami smiled nervously at him before replying, "Wellâ€|I like lots of different kinds! I especially enjoy comedy and action. I tend to like action because it is so energizing, I think. After I watch the movie, I want to go out and beat up some villains!" She giggled in nervousness, causing Mamoru to laugh with, releasing any tension that was within the small car.

They finally reached downtown Tokyo, its bright lights overshadowing the headlights on his car. Turning off onto a side street, Mamoru parked the car in a crowded parking lot and walked with Ami into the busy restaurant. A very hectic hostess led them to a more secluded

corner booth, the soft candle glowing lightly in the dim restaurant.

After they ordered some calamari to start off their dinner they talked about school, their friends, and common interests.

"So, Mamoru|when did you meet Usagi? Are you two just really close friends?" Ami asked curiously, fidgeting a bit with her dark blue napkin.

"Usagi? OH! Well, I've been friends with her since I first moved here. She was kind to me the first day and we became close friends. She helps me out when I really need someone. I've really leaned on her a lot since I arrived here and I don't think that I would have adjusted as well if it weren't for her." He replied, speaking from his heart, his gratitude to her apparent to all.

They stopped talking as the waitress arrived with their food. Ami began to play with her fettuccini alfredo as she waited for Mamoru to have his food served. It was only moments later that the waitress left, and Mamoru had a heaping plate of spaghetti and meatballs in front of him. "I thought that maybe we could check out the new action movie that has Tom Cruise in it." Mamoru commented as he began to help himself to the generous serving of food sitting in front of him.

"Oh, I love Tom Cruise! He is such a great actor, isn't he?" Ami gushed.

"Uhâ€| I guess he is. I like him in action movies. Butâ€|I just can't seem to find him that attractive. Ok. Time for an honest question. Who is more good looking- Tom Cruise or me?"

"Umâ€|geeâ€|that's a difficult one. I think that I'd have to choose Tom Cruise! He has just been my favorite actor for such a long time!"

They continued to banter back and forth as the meal continued. They soon left the restaurant and began their walk to the movie theater several doors down from the busy restaurant.

Mamoru paid for their tickets and they picked up a soda before trying to find a seat in the packed theater. Once settled, they struggled to find something to talk about before the movie began.

"Soâ€|umâ€|are you busy with school now, Ami?"

"Yesâ€|yes I am. Very busy. Yes." She replied and quickly took a sip from the soda.

"What do you keep busy with?" Mamoru continued, not wanting the date to be this uncomfortable.

"Lots of things: student council, homework, photography club, and writing club. What about you?" She turned to look at him with her dark blue eyes, curious.

"There is soccer, student council, and homework mainly for me. Usagi and I work hard together to keep our grades high."

Their conversation was cut short as the lights dimmed and the movie began.

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"Did you like the part where he punched the guy and the guy fell down? Orâ€|when he saved the woman? Or maybe his expression when he knew he was tricked?" Ami continued to speak excitedly about the movie as they walked to where Mamoru had parked his car.

He let Ami in her door and walked around the front of the car to let himself in, and Ami must have waited as well, for she began to chatter about the movie incessantly the entire ride home. * I just wish she would stop! Yesâ€|it was good, but definitely not THAT good. * Ami began to slow down her talking as they neared her home, suddenly becoming shy and soon the only sound in the car was of their breathing.

Mamoru parked the car smoothly along the curbside and then ran around to Ami's side to let her out and escort her to the door.

"Wellâ€|" Ami began, her voice only a whisper, "That was fun. I hope that we can do it again sometime soon."

"Yes, lets." Mamoru answered as he tilted her head up so that her blue eyes gazed into his own. He leaned down and Ami closed her eyes, her lips parting expectantly.

5. All By Myself

Chapter 5: All By Myself

Chapter 5: All By Myself

Mamoru straightened up, surprised that Ami wanted a goodnight kiss on their first date. He coughed discreetly, hoping that Ami would stop waiting; she looked sort of ridiculous with her eyes closed and her lips puckered.

Ami opened her eyes quickly and a blush appeared on her cheeks. "Um...I think I'll go inside now." she said, keeping her eyes averted from his. She scraped the key along the lock several times and looked at Mamoru sheepishly, her face flaming red and it was on her eighth attempt that she was finally able to open the door.

After thanking Mamoru for the great night, she hastily closed the door, her embarrassment obvious.

"I'll see you on Monday I guess..." Mamoru said to the closed-door only inches from his face and then he turned back to his car. He considered his actions as he walked to his car, feeling terrible for the fact that he caused her undue embarrassment. * I never kiss on the first date! It's a policy of mine that won't be changing even if I am in a foreign country. I don't care what people do around here!*

"â€|and that's the story!" Mamoru said to Usagi, who still sat beside him on the bench, her body turned towards his and her eyes remained focused on his own.

"So?" Usagi inquired

"Soâ€|what?"

"So, did you ask her out again?"

"Uhâ€|was I supposed to?"

"Well, if you want to date her again, I suggest you do. This time, if you plan on kissing the poor girl, KISS her! Geez...I would have been so embarrassed if you pulled that stunt with me!" Usagi glared at him, frustrated with his cluelessness.

"What? How was I supposed to know? I thought you were supposed to wait several days before calling, so you don't appear desperate!"

Usagi sighed before replying, "That's only what stupid men doâ€| not what smart men do. Are you a smart man or a stupid one?"

"Smart?" Mamoru ventured.

"Now that will depend on how quickly you call Ami back and get that second date!" Usagi said, giving Mamoru her most intimidating look.

"Fine, fine! I'll call her tonight and set up another date, all right?"

"Good boy!" Usagi praised, patting him lightly on the head. She then stood up, picking up her schoolbag that she had placed in the grass beside her, "but now we need to go to study! Come on!" she said, tugging lightly on Mamoru's hand, forcing him to get off the bench. They headed quickly to the library to make up for the lost time.

Monday Usagi heard Ami's version of what happened.

"Can you believe that I just stood there? I was so embarrassed! I mean, I really must've looked so stupid. My face was red for hours after that!" Ami said dramatically, her hip leaning against the side of Usagi's desk.

"The good thing is," she continued, "that he did call and ask for another date. So maybe it didn't end as badly as I thought it did. This time maybe weâ€|" Ami's speech faltered when she noticed Minako was staring at her. Minako's chin was propped on her hand and her eyes were widened with apt attention. Her dark blue eyes mocked Ami's every word.

Ami, unaccustomed to the animosity that emanated from Minako, turned back to Usagi, still feeling Minako's eyes beating into her. "Well, Usagi, I'llâ€|uhâ€|talk to you later, ok? Bye!" She waved at Usagi before

scurrying back to her own desk, far away from the evil looks she was receiving from Minako.

As soon as Ami resumed her seat Usagi turned to look at Minako. Minako currently had an innocent look pasted on her face, her eyes wide and shining with innocence. "Mina, you can't fool me. I know you did something, so fess up, what did you do?" Usagi lightly tapped her fingers on her desk as she awaited Minako's answer.

Minako rolled her eyes and sighed a long, drawn out sigh before explaining herself, "All I did was glare at the aggravating yapper. I mean, c'mon! Why is she dating Mamoru when its obvious that you two are far better suited? I just don't want you to give up something that you deserve. Plus, all she was doing was bragging. She can brag to her annoying friends in their annoying little cluster of annoying people."

Usagi's eyes widened and she began to involuntarily giggle. All the years of being ignored and treated like crap from the girls that were included in Ami's "annoying group" made her have to laugh at Mina's apt description of the girls engrossed in their beauty magazines that mocked the idea of school and concentrated on mainly guys and looks. A few curious classmates turned to see what Usagi was giggling at, but couldn't figure it out because she was the only one giggling and Minako sat there peacefully, a look of innocence on her face.

With the next day, a surprise came. The surprise was

a tall, athletic brunette who crashed into Usagi when she turned the corner on her way to Rei's.

Usagi grunted with the impact and the brunette looked at her, concern filling her bright green eyes.

"Are you ok?" the stranger asked her.

"Yeahâ€œ|I'll be okay. Don't worry about it." Usagi replied, gaining assistance from the brunette to stand. After she dusted off her black shorts, Usagi turned her attention back to the brunette only to find that she had already left. "Oddâ€œ|" she mumbled to herself, unaware that someone was watching her from the beyond the trees.

Continuing on to Rei's, she began to feel that someone was watching her, but the streets were empty save a few leaves that blew across the lonely road. Shaking off the feeling, she walked a bit faster before she turned into the street with Rei's shrine and entered the building where a feeling of peace descended upon her body. Smiling slightly, she slid open the doors that separated Rei from the rest of the world and Usagi found Rei kneeling in front of a large fire, its flames reaching the ceiling, but leaving no trace of being there. Mystified, she only stared until Rei suddenly turned around, her eyes containing only her pupil, her irises having disappeared. Rei blinked a couple times until her eyes turned to normal and she smiled at Usagi, the flames of the fire having shrunk to the size of a normal fire.

"Reiâ€œ|are you okay? Your eyes lookedâ€œ|they looked weird! Are you all right?" Usagi asked, concerned.

She placed the back of her right hand against Rei's forehead to check for any fever. "No. Not a fever! What's the matter Rei?"

Rei pulled her long hair into a ponytail at the base of her neck before answering, "Usagi, I have a gift where I can see the future sometimes, and I am able to see this future better when I look into the fire. It helps me concentrate. I was just checking on the future of a client when I heard you open the door. Nothing is wrong with me." Rei explained slowly and calmly, trying to allay any fears that Usagi might have.

Usagi stared at Rei for a bit, her blue eye piercing into Rei's dark purple eyes as if trying to find out what Rei was thinking. Usagi blinked and then smiled, apparently realizing that what Rei had explained made sense. "Rei, I believe you! You will definitely have to explain more of this to me later, ok? First, we need to go to my house because I'm expected there!"

Rei nodded and left the room to change. While she was gone, Usagi looked around the room. Her curious eyes investigated where Rei had been sitting just minutes ago and her gaze wandered to the ceiling, searching for any signs that the gigantic fire she had just seen has been there. * What was Rei looking for? Was she looking into my future? Does she read minds too? OH NO!! What if she is? OH! I know. I'll think something silly and see if she laughs!! Fuzzy Wuzzy was a bear, Fuzzy Wuzzy had no hair. Fuzzy Wuzzy wasn't very fuzzy, was he? Nope! Not funny enoughâ€|

Rei! Rei! She's our girl!! She can do it, but her hair won't curl!! * Silence met her odd thoughts. * Well, I guess she isn't psychicâ€|*

Usagi moved back to the doorway while waiting for Rei to return. Rei returned several minutes later in a dark red sleeveless dress with small gold flowers that bordered on both the collar and the hem, ending just above her knees. They both left the shrine and hurried across town to Usagi's house, entering just before supper was to be served.

After dinner, Usagi and Rei retired to the living room so that they could have more privacy when they talked.

The room was very large and had hardwood floors and simple, white walls decorated with family pictures. On the right side of the room was a piano that looked like it was taken care of, due to its shined surface. Across the room from the piano was a large beige couch accented by white pillows. After they settled down on the beige couch, Rei turned to Usagi suddenly, her gaze intense. "Usagi, I think that it's time that you realized that Mamoru may have feelings besides friendship towards you."

Usagi's eyes widened, the irises shrinking in shock as she stared, stunned speechless, at Rei's announcement.

Continuing as if she hadn't shocked Usagi thunderstruck, Rei began to explain herself. "Listen before you say anything, okay? He talked to you first, he was fascinated with you from what it sounds like from his perspective. He spends the majority of

his free time with you, whether it's studying, going to club functions, cram school, or even hanging out. You are the one to force him to hang out with more people and the one that told him that he should date Ami. Do you think that he would have if you hadn't suggested it in the first place? I doubt it. So, he was probably planning on doing something with you, but instead you practically forced him onto Ami and told him that they should date! Now, he is dating someone that he may or may not have feelings for just because you believed that it was the "right" thing to do. I think that you should take your righteousness and kick it in the butt. No more of this "but it's better this way" attitude! You need to realize that you are a person too and deserve to be respected as such. Get out there and stand up for yourself when the other students at your school decide to pick on you. You are so much of a better person than they are and you need to realize that."

Usagi began to stare at her as if she had finally grown the other head that had been seeded there for years. "Reiâ€|" She began.

"Don't 'Rei' me in that tone of voice. I know exactly what you are thinking and better stop that train of thought before it reaches the station. I mean it. I can't stand how you look at yourself! Can't you see how beautiful and smart and all-around wonderful you are? Damn, it just makes me mad when you look at yourself negatively! Stand tall and hold your chin up.

From what it sounds like, the majority of the people

that you go to school with are just plain idiots and would be taken aback if you finally showed your more rebellious side. Be proud of yourself for once."

"Do I get a turn now, Rei?" Usagi asked stiffly.

After Rei nodded her assent, Usagi stood up, crossed her arms across her chest and began pacing around the large room, her limbs moving jerkily. "I am sorry that I don't live up to your expectations, but I am who I am. You have to let me be this way for now. I don't know what Mamoru's feelings are toward me, but I doubt that they are more than friendship. Yes, he did talk to me first and yes, he does do a lot of things with me. That doesn't automatically conclude that he desperately needs to date me. It just means that I am a good companion. We have helped each other out and that's all. Just give us room. He doesn't want me in that way. I know that, and you have to look at it too and realize that I am right about this. There never will be anything between us. I can feel it. He'll end up with some smart, beautiful woman and have his 2.5 kids and the family pet and be happy. I'll live in my apartment with my 40 cats and be single. And happy."

She turned so that she was staring fully at Rei, a pair of brilliant blue eyes met those of a startling violet, and Usagi pleaded, "Please Rei, just for now, don't worry about Mamoru and I in that context. I want him to be happy, and if he is happy with Ami-so happy that he decides that he doesn't need me anymore—that's great. The main issue here is that I want him

to be happy. That's all."

Rei stared at Usagi's eyes for a couple breathless seconds, and then nodded her agreement. "I'll stay out of it on one condition." She stated.

"What condition is that?"

"That you will admit that you are in love with him."

End
file.